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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM PHUM PINR RS
SUBJECT: LATEST MURDER OF CHECHEN CHARITY ACTIVISTS LEAVES
EVERYONE WONDERING WHY

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor David Kostelancik; reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The August 10 abduction and murder in Grozniy of Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband Alik Dzhabrailov, activists with the children's charity "Save the Generation," has left many wondering who carried out the attack and why it occurred. Commentators agree that the murders bring additional pressure on Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov for -- at worse -- ordering the deaths or -- at best -- failing to keep order in the North Caucasus republic. More of the most thoughtful minds on this troubled region, while not painting Kadyrov as the victim, are beginning to see the spiraling violence in Chechnya as an attempt by others not allied to the Chechen president to destabilize the situation there further in the hopes that the Kremlin will be forced to replace him. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Chechen charity activists Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband Alik Dzhabrailov were discovered murdered in the trunk of their car in the early morning on August 11 in the Grozniy suburb of Chernorechiye. The two had been escorted from the office of the charitable organization "Save the Generation" by a group of men who the media reported were "dressed like officers from the security forces" on the afternoon of August 10. (Note: The internet-based Caucasian Knot reported August 12 that a local human rights activist stated that Sadulayeva and Dzhabrailov had been taken to a police station in the city's Leninskiy region that afternoon, but this has not been confirmed. End Note).

¶3. (SBU) Possible explanations for the murders have begun to appear in the Moscow media. Most journalists with whom we spoke did not know the two personally, but knew that the organization for which they worked was purely charitable with no overt political (or even greater human rights) point of view. Some journalists noted that Dzhabrailov had previously been a member of an armed insurgent group for which he had served time in prison. The two had married several months ago after his release. Chechen President Kadyrov and others have seized on Dzhabrailov's past as a possible motive for the couple's murders, although some commentators noted that women are usually not spared involvement under the region's strict code for blood feuds. Dzhabrailov has been linked to a group of insurgents under warlord Shamil Basayev. Caucasus Knot reported August 13 that a relative of Sadulayeva said she had sustained bruises and her hand broken in two places prior to her death.

¶4. (SBU) Unlike their reaction to the July 15 abduction and murder of human rights activist Natalya Estemirova, most human rights activists controlled their immediate reflex to blame Kadyrov personally for the murders. Alexander Cherkasov from the Memorial Human Rights Group told reporters he had no idea who would have wanted to kill the couple, but in another stab at Kadyrov, said that "Estemirova's death was politically related. But it is unclear who would kill members of a humanitarian organization." Adding to the

public relations feud going on between Memorial and the Chechen president, Kadyrov took another opportunity to besmirch her memory, telling reporters that Sadulayeva "only helped people -- children and invalids" but added that if Estemirova had limited herself to human rights work instead of "misleading the public and writing lies," then he also would not be able to explain her death either. (Note: After Memorial head Oleg Orlov publicly blamed Kadyrov for Estemirova's death at a Moscow press conference, Kadyrov reportedly filed a defamation suit against him. Kadyrov further raised the ire of human rights activists August 8 with his statements on Radio Liberty that Estemirova never had "honor, dignity or a conscience." End Note.) While Kadyrov did hold an extraordinary session of his security cabinet in connection with the deaths of Sadulayeva and Dzhabrailov, it was not until after Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev had himself called for a full investigation of their murders.

¶5. (SBU) Commentators and at least one opposition party have begun to nudge the Kremlin to take action against the increasing violence in Chechnya. Aleksey Makarkin, Deputy Director of the Center for Political Technologies, faulted the Kremlin for failing to send a signal to Kadyrov that his future depends on resolving the murders of human rights activists in Chechnya. By not so doing, he continued, Kadyrov understands that there will be no consequences for him as a result of the continued violence. Makarkin added that human rights activists fall victim to the internal settling of scores in Chechnya and Kadyrov prefers not to interfere because -- perhaps a reference to his ongoing feud with the Yamadayev clan -- Kadyrov does not want any more

MOSCOW 00002074 002 OF 002

conflicts with people who settle disputes in this fashion. An August 12 article in the daily Moskovskiy Komsomolets surmised that Chechen law enforcement authorities will take no action to end the violence unless top Chechen leaders are threatened, leaving the civilian population to live between Kadyrov's authoritarian rule on one side and armed gangs on the other.

¶6. (SBU) On August 12 the outspoken independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta announced the suspension of its activities in Chechnya in solidarity with human rights and charitable organizations that have also ceased working there. It also brazenly asked Prime Minister Vladimir Putin if there was a "coordinated plan to annihilate human rights activists" and if Moscow had ceded full control of the situation in the republic to Kadyrov. The opposition Yabloko party also seized upon Moscow's weakness in the region. It issued a statement August 13 calling for a change in the federal government's policies in the North Caucasus, adding that the kidnapping and murder of Sadulayeva and Dzhabrailov shows the "inability of the regional governments to perform their functions, marks a failure of the federal policies in Chechnya, where unlimited power was vested in Ramzan Kadyrov and none of the human rights envisaged by the Constitution of the Russian Federation are guaranteed, including the right to life."

Comment

¶7. (C) Some have found a more unsettling explanation for the recent violence against human rights activists. Aleksey Malashenko, an expert on the North Caucasus and Islam at the Moscow Carnegie Center, alluded publicly that there may be paramilitary groups not under the control of Kadyrov who are victimizing innocent human rights activists in their struggle against the Chechen president. Musa Pliyev, an advisor to Ingushetiya president Yunus-Bek Yevkurov before the latter was injured in a June 22 suicide car-bomb blast, agreed that this could be the case. Under their scenario, fighters loyal to forces like the Yamadayevs who have lost their support from Moscow and any hope of toppling Kadyrov militarily,

could see an advantage to sacrificing a few human rights defenders to incite greater outrage against Kadyrov, hoping that the Kremlin will replace him with a weaker personality or one without his own personal army. Kadyrov has given no indication that he feels weakened by the increased violence and is not amenable to leave the scene quietly.

RUBIN